

Maj. Gen. Torrence Saxe

Commissioner & Adjutant General

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Alaska National Guard

*Department of Military
and Veterans Affairs*

Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska

STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

20-107

November 24, 2020

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Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs

Respect – a common thread between Alaska Native and military cultures

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — November is National American Indian Heritage month, also known as American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month. During this time, the U.S. Armed Services honors and celebrates the diverse cultures, traditions, and histories of America's indigenous people who have served their nation.

Maj. Walter Hotch-Hill, deputy chief of staff for personnel for the Alaska Army National Guard, is a Tlingit Alaska Native from Southeast Alaska, who has served in the Alaska National Guard for 18 years.

"I started off by enlisting in June of 2002 as a chemical operations specialist," said Hotch-Hill. "I served there for four years, coming in as a Private 1st Class, and made it to Specialist."

After only four years in the AKNG, Hotch-Hill said that his commander recommended he commission as officer. After commissioning and completing his training, he immediately deployed to Iraq in 2007-2008.

Hotch-Hill explained that it was both a sense of family tradition to serve in the military as well as education benefits that influenced his decision to enlist. He was able to not only get tuition assistance to complete his Bachelor of Science degree, but also his Master of Arts in Human Resource Management.

"It's a combination of things," he explained. "I have a lot of family members that have served in the military, so there's the general desire to do service in the military, but also because I wanted to stay in Alaska, so the National Guard was a good fit for that. I also was going to school at the time, and the National Guard has good benefits to help you pay for college."

Hotch-Hill grew up in both Sitka and Hoonah, in Southeast Alaska, and he explained that his heritage comes from his mother's side.

"I'm a Tlingit; my clan is Raven, T'akdeintaan," he said. "That's because that's what my mother is. Tlingits are matrimonial, so you take what your mother is," he explained.

Respect is a big part of military culture, and Hotch-Hill said that this sort of respect is ingrained in his personality, because it is a defining characteristic of his culture.

"It's a big part of who I am," Hotch-Hill said. "My culture has shaped me as a person. Tlingit culture is big on respect and respecting your elders, and that's something that has benefited me both as a person and

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as a military member, remembering that importance of honor and respect and how you treat people with dignity, regardless of what you're doing, that's going to help you in life and your interactions with other people.

"That respect for elders is really almost as rigorous as respecting your chain of command and your senior leaders," he continued. "When you go out and do things, if an elder asks you to do something, it's not something you question; you do what the elders have asked you to do."

Hotch-Hill reflected on how diversity within the Alaska National Guard is one of its strengths, because it provides Guardsmen with an opportunity to be exposed to differing viewpoints and perspectives.

"I think diversity in general is important," he explained. "Being a part of the Alaska National Guard, I think it's important to have people who have ties to Alaska and the community, which also provides a diverse base, and that makes us a better organization if we have more points of view and different ways of looking at things."

Alaska National Guardsmen come from not only the more populated areas of the state, but also many of the small villages in remote areas of Alaska. Hotch-Hill explained that the Alaska National Guard's ability to reach out and support various communities within the state is a symbiotic relationship, benefiting both the communities as well as the Guardsmen.

"In one instance," he said, "we conducted training events out in Bethel. We supported the Kuskokwim 300 sled-dog race, brought Soldiers in from other parts of Alaska, and then supported out into Tuluksak and the Bogus Creek checkpoints. I think it was beneficial for some of the Soldiers that have never experienced life outside Anchorage to go out to some of these villages and see, and also for some of the Soldiers that lived there to be able to share their culture and their land with people who hadn't been out there very often or ever before, to be able to tie it into relevant training for our Soldiers, like doing cold weather training."

Hotch-Hill further explained that even within Alaska Native cultures, there are differences depending on the region. He said that having an open mind allows people to learn from one another.

"Be open to learning new things about different cultures," said Hotch-Hill. "Even within Alaska Natives, there are a lot of differences. Even myself, being Alaska Native, I go into other communities with an open mind to try to understand their perspective and where they are coming from."

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PHOTOS

1. **Attached pdf** includes story and a small selection of low-resolution photos for viewing on screen.
2. **DVIDS link** includes selected full-resolution photos. (Accessible from military computers.)

<https://www.dvidshub.net/news/383740/respect-common-thread-between-alaska-native-and-military-cultures>



Maj. Walter Hotch-Hill (center), deputy chief of staff for personnel for the Alaska National Guard, poses with his mother, Laurie Cropley, and his father, Raino Hill, on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska. Hotch-Hill is a Tlingit Alaska Native from Southeast Alaska, who has served in the Alaska National Guard for 18 years. (Photo courtesy of Maj. Walter Hotch-Hill)